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The role plays implementation in teaching macroeconomics

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Abstract

When applying a suitable combination of different modern methods of education, it is possible to improve quality and attractiveness of higher education and readiness of students, not only for successful completion of the exam syllabus, final paper, final state exams, but also to deal with everyday life and work situations, creating a precondition for the successful application of the students in their further activities outside of school. We have shown an example in the article how you can use the method of role plays within the teaching of Macroeconomics and increase the attractiveness of the subject and efficiency of education for students of Informatics.

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1. Introduction

University teachers in Slovakia are evaluated according to their research and publication activity more than ever in the past. There are constantly increasing demands for publication in prestigious journals and participation at major international conferences. Their teaching activity remains on the verge of interest, although, paradoxically, the public and students see it just in the first place in the context of university. In fact, students are much more interested in how the teacher explains, or presents the topic and whether he/she awakens interest than what success in publishing activities he/she achieves. For education at university is important to appropriately transform knowledge into science education. This issue is addressed, for example Rostášová, Čorejová, Chrenková (2013).

The students themselves are a key element in the implementation of education. Their motivational readiness to

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learn depends, apart from other things, on the emotional state of mind, cultural and educational background. Emotional state and disposition also have influence on what their approach will be learning. Interest in the subject depends on the content and form of presentation, teacher, student and other factors. Everything, however, is determined by time opportunities arising out of the schedule, number of students in a group, spatial capabilities, and teacher willingness and alike.

The methods used represent an important tool for ensuring the educational process. The selection of appropriate methods is determined by the aim of the subject. However, the use of a suitable combination of mutual educational methods should be conditional on the individual needs of students and teachers, social needs and trends. The selection should respond to the current global trends in technical, economic, and educational research and development. The implementation of appropriate methods is determined by various factors. It is, for example, the number of students in one group, their present and desired level of knowledge, skills, motivation to learn, functional position. The level of expertise and experience of teachers and spatial capabilities are also important.

2. Factors affecting the choice of educational methods

In the implementation of educational activities it is necessary to accept the fact that the efficiency and willingness of students to learn is influenced by several factors, which can be classified into three basic groups. **These factors are:**

- **Physical** – health condition, especially the state of the visual and auditory sense, bloodstream, and serious chronic or acute illness, stress may affect the ability of perception and learning.
- **Emotional** – when self-image, motivation, support for learning by neighbourhood or family, and ultimately the state and changes of the whole emotional system (shared values, attitudes ...) significantly affect people's ability to learn and change.
- **Intellectual** – the quantity and quality of previously acquired knowledge and skills can promote learning, if it is possible to continue the knowledge obtained and build on them. However, they may create barrier to learning, where existing knowledge is in contrast with the new one. (Table 1)

When implementing the education, it is important that teachers respond to what are the preferred learning styles of participants (Kucharčíková, 2013) and, where possible, remove barriers to learning.

Table 1. Factors affecting the choice of educational methods.

FACTORS AFFECTING THE CHOICE OF EDUCATIONAL METHODS				
LEARNING OBJECTIVES:	HUMAN FACTORS:	SUBJECT AND CONTENT:	TIME AND MATERIAL FACTORS:	PRINCIPLES OF LEARNING:
- knowledge	- teachers	- specific requirements	- time (schedule)	- motivation
- skills	- students	- for subject	- rooms (classrooms, and their equipment)	- active involvement
- abilities	- surroundings	- interdisciplinary problems		- individual approach
- attitudes				- feedback
- values				- transfer of knowledge

3. Educational methods

In order to achieve a higher efficiency of education it is appropriate to use a combination of several methods. The most frequently used includes lectures, seminars, but more modern and more efficient are so-called participatory methods.

Lectures are verbal presentations of a particular topic. They are suitable for the presentation of a large amount of information to large groups, but there is missing the opportunity to mutual interaction of a lecturer with participants. They are focused primarily on improving knowledge. They can be very impressive and imaginative using modern

multimedia tools; however, in terms of preserving the information, they are not very effective.

Seminars, in the form of papers and discussions, are focused on exchanging information and opinions of participants on the topics known in advance. The advantage is the support and development of ideas, immediate feedback. However, the quality of learning depends on the knowledge level of the participants.

Participatory methods expect a high degree of activity and personal involvement of participants in the learning process. They are designed only for smaller groups of participants, but their advantage is that they encourage better retention of learned. They are contemporary modern methods of education. (Table 2)

Training puts emphasis mainly on the active acquisition of skills and qualifications. It is a form of experiential learning based on the fact that people learn more and faster if they "try something" than read the information, or heard, for example, in a lecture or seminar. There is preferable to procedural aspects of learning. The training process is focused on a higher degree of participation of participants than in the classic sense of learning. Participants are activating in the form of group work, management games, brainstorming, case study, role plays, etc. Integral part of the training is to provide feedback and evaluation of activities performed. The efficiency and quality of evaluation are increasing using cameras and evaluating of individual activities performed. Use a variety of teaching methods is analyzed by many authors (Oxoby, 2001; Sloman, Mitchell, 2002).

Table 2. The possibility of use of certain participatory educational methods

METHOD	DESCRIPTION	ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES
Maze	It uses induced situation. At some point, the participants have more options to choose when solving the task and at the same time they discover the consequences of one of the selected option. They proceed in this way until they solve the task successfully. The use is appropriate in small groups for education in the field of decision-making.	– own pace possible – a high degree of participation of participants	– the most learn those who are wrong – time-consuming – preparation demands for the lecturer
Aquarium	One group of participants solve the task, the second group watches it, and subsequently provides feedback. Used in groups with a maximum of 10 - 12 participants in teaching interpersonal and management skills.	– practicing the technique of providing feedback – possibility of a thorough practicing of the skills learned	– stage fright and nervousness of participants who solve the task and are watched – demands for facilitation by the lecturer
Solving the incident	The method is similar to the case study. There are assigned the basic facts of the incident and the group decides what additional information is necessary and what questions must be answered. The method is suitable for a group of up to 10 people in teaching management skills, problem diagnosis and analysis of facts.	– exploring real problems without risk – good simulation of reality	– sense of artificiality of the situation by the participants
Workshop	Popular method designed to discuss specific situations and find possible approaches to their positive management. It can be also used in group with a maximum of 15 participants trained in communication and management skills.	– informality – possibility to solve specific working problems – also used at larger groups	– demands on teacher facilitation skills
Role plays	Group gets the script with roles. There are played the selected work situation and examined various possible approaches to solving problems or unexpected events. They are suitable for teaching interpersonal, consulting, marketing, management and training skills in a group of 8 – 10 participants.	– entertainment – practical exercises and unpleasant situations	– games can be considered to be unrealistic – concerns and stage fright of unsuccessful "acting" performance

Currently, there has been dynamically expanding **E-learning** (electronic education), which is faster and cheaper than other conventional forms of education, but its use is limited to the theme of education and technological equipment of companies. The advantages of using modern ICT in education is also the fact that: the student can use his own pace, updated material is available immediately and it can be provided for a large number of students at the

same time, opinions and thoughts on the topic being acquired can be easily exchanged among the participants. Some disadvantages can include the following factors: lack of visual contact with the teacher in each group, therefore, non-verbal reactions cannot be easily captured and processed; difficult to set down rules of cooperation, high demands are placed on teacher in the coordination and involvement of all participants.

The more efficient application of any method is supported by audio-visual device, such as flipchart, projector, overhead projector, whiteboard, various educational or amusing films, models or support materials. Fashion hit is the use of computers and presentation of educated themes in PowerPoint programme. The risk is that the interactivity is disappearing and teachers and students often focus more on the visual aspect of the presentation when creating presentation, the content is underestimated. We should not forget the appropriate arrangement of the room where the educational activities are practiced. The arrangement is necessary to adapt to the main theme of activity, methods used, group size, room size, timing etc. Also, new technologies open new possibilities and opportunities in education. When using them, it is necessary to pay attention to that they can meet the expectations of students and make learning efficient enough. The conditions and approaches to learning, as well as specific conditions for learning support, are generally applicable and it is necessary to pay attention to them, even using the most modern technologies. For example Sosin (1998) devotes attention to the use of ICT to teach economics.

4. Combination of educational methods

The creation of more effective combinations of these methods and the ability to design new innovative methods of education will be important for the future. (Kucharčíková, Vodák, 2001) The biggest innovations in education in recent years have been associated specifically with the use of information and communication technologies. The programmes developed on this basis provide a wide range of learning opportunities to achieve various needs. It is easiest to programmes that emphasize knowledge and can provide users with information in a structured and logical manner. Moreover, they can use it at their free time and can be linked with libraries or databases on the Internet. (Buckley, Capple, 2004) Current methods of education should support the development of creativity and flexibility, willingness to receive and respond to changes and the use of modern technical and support means.

In the context of teaching there often occur problems with rooms, schedule, time-tables, etc., many students focus on "chasing credits" than studies and sometimes are not interested in the subject as such. However, all those who are excited about the subject or a particular area, it is worth doing experiments and innovate teaching with non-traditional methods and procedures.

The global economy has built many business in a position in which it is asked to effectively manage liquidity and funding, due to the current crisis. Without knowledge about good financial management a company will hardly survive in heavy competition (Chodasová, Tekulová, 2014). In an economy where the offer and the demand meet even more often in the virtual space, it is high time to eliminate the time and space barriers, and to use Internet as a business environment" (Moga, Buhociu, Ionita, Virlanuta, Antohi, Zugravu, 2009). Achieving the goals of the enterprise assumes that managers dominate knowledge of management and receive technical and economic measures and social measures aimed at increasing the performance and motivation employees (Klučka, 2014). The current labour market effects the university education to a large extent requiring a graduate of interdisciplinary knowledge and with the skills to find the solutions to both technological and economic issues (Ďurišová, 2013). But many contemporary students study subjects that are not profiled for their chosen field of study with displeasure and unwillingness. The most common argument used therein, is "what I do in life will be?" It depends on the teacher that he himself explain the practical application of the "unpopular" subject or to ask the students themselves to seek and identify possibilities for practical application. This also applies to students of Informatics who are prejudiced to study the subjects of economic and managerial specialization. In order to increase motivation and efficiency of teaching the subjects of economic character for students of study programme Informatics, we have innovated teaching Macroeconomics at the Faculty of Management Science and Informatics using participatory methods of education. In the context of the previous text, we apply a combination of lectures, discussions, brainstorming, group work, buzzing groups within teaching. At the end of the semester, when students have plenty of expertise knowledge, obtained presentation skills and have enough experience of teaching using participatory methods, we use role plays "Negotiation."

5. Role play - NEGOTIATION

In role plays, participants use their own experiences to play a real life situation. When done well, role plays increase the participants' self-confidence, give them the opportunity to understand or even feel empathy for other people's viewpoints or roles, and usually end with practical answers, solutions or guidelines.

Role plays are useful for exploring and improving interviewing techniques and examining the complexities and potential conflicts of group meetings. They help participants to consolidate different lessons in one setting and are good energisers.

However, role plays can be time-consuming and their success depends on the willingness of participants to take active part. Some trainees may feel a role play is too exposing, threatening or embarrassing. This reluctance may be overcome at the outset by careful explanation of the objectives and the outcome. Some role plays can generate strong emotions amongst the participants. It is therefore essential that a role play is followed by a thorough debriefing. This provides the opportunity for the trainer and the participants to raise and assess new issues. (Kenya)

The rapid and steady changes in a field of information and communication technologies have increased demand for high qualified specialists not only in a field of cybernetics and applied informatics, but also in related fields such as economy and management. (Tokarčíková, 2013)

This role play is designed for students of Macroeconomics to practice and repeat topics related to models of macroeconomics equilibrium (Keynes's model of equilibrium output determination, IS-LM Model, IS-LM-BP Model, AD-AS Model), topics related to macroeconomic problems (unemployment) and the application of knowledge in the field of economic policy, particularly fiscal, monetary and trade policy. In addition to repeating knowledge of entire semester study of Macroeconomics, the aim of the game is that students examine communication skills, professional reasoning, presentation and teamwork.

All students are always involved in a game within a particular study group. Tasks that they play within the activity are assigned to them either by the teacher or they choose them themselves. Based on our experience, it is more preferable when under observation of character properties and communication skills of the students during the semester, the teacher determines the key players of game which are three members of the government (left-wing, right-wing and independent expert).

Players:

- 3 members of the government – left-wing, right-wing and independent,
- advisory teams – each member of the government has at his disposal two policy advisers and two experts from the field (there may be three experts depending on the number of students present in the group),
- journalists – observers: 3 – 4 students.

Tools:

- 7 types of information sheets:
 - information sheet – member of the government: member of left-wing party, member of the right party, independent member,
 - information sheet – political advisors: advisor for left-wing party, advisor for right-wing party,
 - information sheet – expert advisors,
 - information sheet – journalists,
- other gadgets: flipchart, whiteboard, coloured markers, clean sheets of paper, camera, projector.

Time subsidy for the game is 100 min. At the beginning of the teaching, all players / students receive short game instruction input from the teacher (10 min.). Subsequently, there are distributed information sheets with the necessary instructions to all players. It is basically a scenario according to which the players will play their roles. The examples of information sheets are in the following part of the article.

Information sheet

Managerial game - NEGOTIATION**Member of the government - representative of left-wing party/ right-wing party/ independent expert**

Slovakia is the country of EU with a high degree of unemployment. Although governments have taken various measures to address this problem in different years, we still have not won over the high unemployment.

You are a member of the present government to which you are nominated by a political party oriented to **left-wing (social)/ right-wing/ independent expert**. Your **task** will be to read and think about this instruction during 5 minutes. Then, prepare together with your advisory team (which consists, first, of either your political contemporaries and experts from the economic and social fields) material for government meeting in the course of 25 minutes, where you design various options for addressing high unemployment in the Slovak Republic referring to any difficulties, or advantages and disadvantages of each solution. When preparing, use the knowledge you obtained from the existing study of Macroeconomics - models of macroeconomic equilibrium, economic policies (fiscal, monetary, foreign trade). Proposals must correspond with your political orientation.

It is necessary to prepare these proposals for the government in writing (on A4 paper, flipchart or whiteboard) so that they are clear, understandable and illustrative for all involved.

At the same time prepare for difficult negotiations in the government, which except you, attend even a member of the government for the right-wing party and independent and that will take 30 minutes. Your **task** will be:

1. to present proposals of Yours and Your advisory team: 7 min.,
2. to respond to the objections of other members of the government,
3. to factually discuss the other two proposals,
4. to decide to adopt one proposal.

Information sheet

Managerial game - NEGOTIATION**Political advisors of right-wing / left-wing politics**

Slovakia is the country of EU with a high degree of unemployment. Although governments have taken various measures to address this problem in different years, we still have not won over the high unemployment.

You are the members of the political advisory team of one of the members of the present government for your **right-wing/left-wing party**. Your **task** will be to read and think about this instruction during 5 minutes. Then, help to prepare material for government session for the member of government of your political group together with his expert advisory team, where you propose various possibilities for addressing high unemployment in the Slovak Republic referring to any difficulties, or advantages and disadvantages of each solution. When preparing, use the knowledge you obtained from the existing study of Macroeconomics - models of macroeconomic equilibrium, economic policies (fiscal, monetary, foreign trade). Proposals must correspond with your political orientation.

For the government negotiations, it is necessary to:

1. prepare proposals in writing (on A4 paper, flipchart or whiteboard) so that they are clear, understandable and illustrative for all involved,
2. prepare for negotiations (prepare your arguments and counter-arguments) to the government for approval of proposals you submitted.

Information sheet

Managerial game - NEGOTIATION**Expert advisors**

Slovakia is the country of EU with a high degree of unemployment. Although governments have taken various measures to address this problem in different years, we still have not won over the high unemployment.

You are members of the political **expert advisory team** of one of the members of the present government. Your **task** will be to read and think about this instruction during 5 minutes. Then, help to prepare material for government session for the member of government together with his political advisory team, where you propose various possibilities for addressing high unemployment in the Slovak Republic referring to any difficulties, or advantages and disadvantages of each solution. When preparing, use the knowledge you obtained from the existing study of Macroeconomics - models of macroeconomic equilibrium, economic policies (fiscal, monetary, foreign trade).

For the government negotiations, it is necessary to:

1. prepare proposals in writing (on A4 paper, flipchart or whiteboard) so that they are clear, understandable and illustrative for all involved,
2. prepare for negotiations (prepare your arguments and counter-arguments) to the government for approval of proposals you submitted.

Managerial game - NEGOTIATION	Information sheet Journalists - observers
<p>Slovakia is the country of EU with a high degree of unemployment. Although governments have taken various measures to address this problem in different years, we still have not won over the high unemployment.</p> <p>You are a member of a group of journalists who follow the preparation and government session where three members of the government will submit proposals to address the problem of unemployment in Slovakia.</p> <p>Your task is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • to notice logical connections, expertise, or political involvement of arguments of government members • to observe: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • behaviour of members of the government before and during the negotiations, • setting goals before the negotiations, • team approach to solving tasks, • decision-making before and during negotiations, • inform the public objectively about the course of negotiations after the government session, • write a short and interesting article in tomorrow's newspaper about what you have observed. 	

Then, the teacher defines physical space for three teams (it is important that the various work teams do not disturb and influence each other), assigns the necessary tools and specifies the beginning of game. He does not provide players with further instructions, all the necessary information is in information sheets. In order to better understand the instructions, they depend only on mutual communication for explanation of uncertainties. Teacher supervises the smooth course, points out time limits, takes notes from observation of students / players throughout the game. He monitors whether and how correctly they solve tasks using the theoretical basis, what extent they are identified with their task, what is the level of activity and participation of individual members, what is the level of mutual communication, cooperation, teamwork, what other skills students apply and he facilitates feedback at the end.

Evaluation represents a final, but very important phase of educational process. Evaluating allows looking back on educational activities, successfulness and interest of students and provides information about what to do in other way in future activities, what improve, what topics omit, what complete etc. For this reason, it is also important to implement evaluation of the game after realization of role plays.

They will get a little feedback about how students worked in content and procedural aspects during the game from journalists / observers. It is a view of the students. However, it is necessary that the players themselves express their initial impressions of the game and subsequently analyze both sides of the problem-solving process (content and process) and identify their contribution to the game and their failures. Finally, teacher provides feedback to the whole game. It depends only on his facilitation skills, to what depth in the feedback he will go and what lessons he "pulls out" of the students. There is one interesting finding arising from our experience. The game of learning "weaker and lazier" students has the greatest positive impact. They understand the reasons just using this form, why they study the subject, they realize their imperfections in the study and final achieve excellent results in the examination. This is precisely the objective. To make subject more attractive for those who do not take interest at the beginning of the semester. These students make the greatest promotion and marketing of the subject among the student public. Of course, it is expected that smart students who deal with their obligations responsibly throughout the semester provide the appropriate background and expertise for the game. These are the students who create the necessary support for the teacher.

Therefore, teacher must appreciate the work and contribution of all involved at the end of the game. The game does not succeed if students bring "great solutions", but when they realize the importance of knowledge obtained during their studies at the university and later in the practical and personal life.

Evaluation has a higher positive effect, if it is done using a camera and playing key situations that arose in the game by using a projector. However, the use of cameras and data projector is significantly limited by time demands of this approach and timetable at university. Evaluation creates preconditions to improve the quality of teaching and increase student interest in the future. Short evaluation can be done after each seminar or lecture and exercise, after a check exam, at the end of the semester, after the examination period, but also at the beginning of the next semester,

when we find the reasons why the students enrolled on the subject. It is implemented using several methods, such as interviews, questionnaire feedbacks, and self-reflection.

6. Conclusion

There has been discussion for longer time in Slovakia that formal education is still focused more on acquiring encyclopaedic knowledge. Teaching is less focused on promoting creativity and its use in the development of skills to identify problems, analyze the specific situation, suggest and evaluate variant solutions, present and defend own solutions. A low ability of students to use the knowledge in practical applications is considered serious deficiency.

We have introduced an example of how is it possible to innovate and make more attractive Macroeconomics for students of Informatics using participatory methods, namely the role plays. It depends only on the teacher, his professional and pedagogical knowledge, skills, experience and creativity to find space for the implementation of participatory methods in the context of teaching his subjects. The reward for efforts will be very satisfied teacher and students, resulting in higher interest in the subject, higher education efficiency and better results. Knowledge, skills and experience that students thus obtain, are a more memorable and easier to apply in the future of their profession even personal life.

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